



Preventing Tooth Decay—A Common Childhood Disease

Public Health Problem

Tooth decay is one of the most common childhood diseases—5 times as common as asthma and 7 times as common as hay fever in 5- to 17-year-olds. Nearly all tooth decay can be prevented when fluoridation is combined with dental sealants and other fluoride products, such as toothpaste. Community water fluoridation is considered one of the great public health achievements of the 20th century; however, currently only 22% of Montana’s population is served by fluoridated public water supplies.

Program Example

The Montana Dental Access Coalition has developed strategies during two statewide summits to improve the oral health of Montana’s citizens, which includes support for the use of fluoride to prevent dental decay. As a way to improve understanding of the benefits of fluoride to local multidisciplinary health professionals, the Fluoride Awareness Project was created by the Coalition with the support of Preventive Health and Health Services (PHHS) Block Grant funds for fiscal year 2001. The Fluoride Awareness Project includes a folder of information about the various sources and benefits of fluoride and community data regarding the level of fluoride in all Montana public water systems. A main objective of the project was to create awareness among dental and medical professionals of local fluoride levels to assist them in prescribing optimal fluoride supplementation and, at the same time, prevents fluorosis. In March 2002, 1,500 Fluoride Awareness Project packets were sent to Montana obstetricians, pediatricians, family practitioners, dentists, dental hygienists, water treatment plant operators, Head Start and Special Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs, school nurses, Indian Health Service dental clinics, community health centers, and other oral health professionals in an effort to provide up-to-date information for use at the local level.

Implications

PHHS Block Grant funds helped address Montana’s dental access crisis by educating health advocates who work with children and families about the effectiveness of fluoride in preventing dental decay. Billings, Montana’s largest city, organized a community water fluoridation campaign and delivered the packets directly to members of the community. Other communities have used the packets to inform city council members and policy makers of the benefits of water fluoridation. Following an additional 450 requests for the packets from health professionals, the Montana Dental Association and the Montana Primary Care Office provided funds for additional mailings.

Contact Information

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